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THE
PRESENT SITUATION 1-4
OF THE
TOWN OF BIRMINGHAM,
RESPECTING ITS
POOR, CONSIDERED.
WITH,
A PROPOSAL
FOR BUILDING
A NEW WORKHOUSE;
ADDRESSED TO THE
INHABITANTS,
BY THE
OVERSEERS OF THE POOR.

BIRMINGHAM,
PRINTED BY PEARSON AND ROLLASON,
MDCCLXXXII.

1547

THE
PRESENT SITUATION
OF THE
TOWN OF BIRMINGHAM

FOR CONSIDERATION

A PARLIAMENTARY

A NEW WORKHOUSE



IN HABITANTS

OVERSEERS OF THE TOWN

BIRMINGHAM
PRINTED BY HARRISON AND SONS
MDCCLXXXII

P R E F A C E.

THE heavy contributions we have been compelled to lay the parish of BIRMINGHAM under, for the support of its poor, seem to claim some apology from us. We presume the most acceptable apology that can be made, is contained in the present publication; which, at the same time that it investigates the cause of the malady, points out a remedy.

We communicate our sentiments in this form, because the matter we had to lay before the public was too copious to be comprized in the

compass of a news-paper advertisement. Whatever determination may be formed in consequence of this address, we shall be satisfied with having done what appeared to us an indispensable duty, and we rest ourselves assured, that our motives at least will be candidly judged of.

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THE
PRESENT SITUATION
OF THE
TOWN of BIRMINGHAM, &c.

THE very rapid increase of the poor's levies in this town for several years past, has been the subject of much complaint from those on whom the principal burden has lain. Notwithstanding, however, such general complaints, and that plans of reformation have been suggested, of which the success in other parishes has given sufficient encouragement to make the trial, no one has stepped forth to remedy this growing evil. The public at large have expected it from the parish officers, while these have found sufficient

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employment for all their time in following the steps their predecessors have trod in, without the trouble of projecting and executing plans of reformation, which therefore, though they saw the necessity of, they left to their successors to put in practice. Thus, has one year after another passed away, while the burden has been annually increasing, till it has accumulated to its present size, and which, unless some speedy remedy is applied, threatens the prosperity and increase of the town in a very great degree. At this time we find numbers of the inhabitants deserting the town, and retreating to parishes in the vicinity, where the taxes are less exorbitant. Upwards of eight thousand pounds has been already expended by the present overseers, and it is very doubtful whether they will be able, with the utmost stretch of economy,

mony, to make four, or even five thousand more, serve them for the expences of the remainder of the year.—Strongly impressed with the importance and necessity of adopting a plan of reformation, the overseers have resolved to lay before the public the result of their enquiries into the cause of the evil complained of, together with a plan for preventing the farther increase of it.

A very slight survey of the state of our poor, must convince any one desirous of informing himself, that the out-pensioners* are the chief foundation of our public grievances. Besides that numerous class whom misfortune, and the decrepitude of age, have rendered

* The money expended on the out-pensioners (including the clothes given away) amounts to more than seven thousand pounds a year; a case, we believe, unparalleled in the parochial history of this kingdom.

necessary objects of relief, great numbers, who have no scruples of pride or delicacy with regard to receiving relief from the parish, as long as it remains a secret to their neighbours, would however shrink from the offer of being taken into the workhouse, and submitting to the good order and government thereof; whilst many, it is much to be feared, squander that money which was intended for the support of their families, in excessive drinking*, and thereby defraud the parish of what ought to be appropriated only to the necessary purposes of subsistence. In cases of sickness, the expence of taking care of the out-poor are considerably enhanced, as (not to mention the additional sums given for nourishment)

* We are credibly informed, that it is a common practice with pawnbrokers to receive our tickets as pledges for money borrowed.

the changes of linen we are obliged to provide them with, form no inconsiderable addition to our expence. The public may have some idea of this, when they are informed, that in many instances, it has been found necessary to furnish them with sheets.

Another cause of the burden complained of is, *want of employment for the poor in the house.* There are a number of men, women, and children go out to work in the different manufactories, the produce of whose labour amounts to between three and four hundred pounds per year; but the opportunities and temptations to bad practices, which being so much at large gives them, has been found exceedingly injurious, particularly in the case of girls and women, whose morals are almost sure to be corrupted, and who are thereby rendered

dered disqualified for domestic services, and from thence prevented being received into families, who might otherwise soon relieve the parish from the expence of their maintenance. Whereas, if proper employment was found within the walls of the house, according to age, strength, and capacity, and the girls employed in such work as would make them desirable servants, it might be considered as a nursery of a very useful class of mankind, and would give no small degree of pleasure to all the friends of virtue, to see a number of their fellow creatures rescued from the effects of early vice. Instances of which have very lately presented themselves, in a number of females, whose excuse to the magistrates, before whom they were taken as prostitutes was, their not having employment in the manufactories where they had formerly earned

an

an honest livelihood. It was to no purpose they were ordered to the work-house to be employed, where no convenience for employing them was; the overseers could only regret their not being able to execute the humane and judicious orders that were given them on this subject. At the present time, on account of the general deadness of trade, there are whole families in the house, the masters of which, when employed, can earn from twelve to fourteen shillings per week, who, on account of their want of employment, are obliged to seek relief in that asylum, which is provided by the laws of their country, and to the support of which they would willingly contribute by their labour, were the means of doing it pointed out to them.

Previous

Previous to the year 1733, there was no house appropriated by the parish for the reception of its poor, when our ancestors saw the necessity of erecting one, which they built of sufficient size to answer the purpose of taking in all the poor who applied for relief. In a few years, by the liberal encouragement given to strangers to settle amongst us, and the consequent increase of the number of poor, the house was found insufficient for its intended purpose, and the overseers were compelled to allow some of the paupers pay out; which, from a small number they began with, now forms a list of 1500 persons. The overseers of 1778 finding a spot of ground within the walls unoccupied, sufficient for a back wing, contracted for making that addition, which their immediate successors compleated. Notwithstanding

withstanding which, the buildings together will not comfortably accommodate 600 persons*, though there are now 30 more than that number in the house.

From the foregoing premises, the conclusion that naturally flows is, that our present only resource is building another work-house, upon a scale proportionably large to our exigency and the size of the town, where proper offices may be erected for the different employments that may be allotted for those who are to inhabit it. We are fully convinced that no temporizing scheme will answer the purpose, and one year's delay may prove the loss of thousands of pounds, which may

* As a proof to what contrivances we are obliged to have recourse, the mistress of the work-house has been under the necessity of putting four grown up persons in a bed; and six children have for a long time slept in a bed together.

C

other.

otherwise be saved. Nor let any one be alarmed at the immediate expence such a plan will occasion. A parliamentary power may be obtained to borrow a sufficient sum on the credit of future levies. It seems but just and right that posterity, who will reap part of the advantage, should bear a part of the expence. We need not, however, look forward to any remote period of time when the loan will be discharged. One-fourth of the savings that would accrue from this plan would not only defray the annual interest, but would likewise in the course of a few years, pay off the sum borrowed, especially if the scheme of annuities for lives was adopted. To accomplish so extensive an undertaking, it is necessary that a committee should be formed of a considerable number of gentlemen, who are willing to lend their assistance on this

this occasion; and it would be very desirable that a clause should be inserted in the proposed bill, to appoint and empower this committee to assist the overseers in future. The multiplicity of business that occurs in so large a parish, renders it impossible for so small a number as six overseers to transact it with the accuracy it requires, or that they are desirous of giving it.

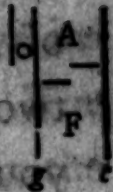
We hope and trust, that there will be public spirit enough found in those gentlemen who may be proposed to form this committee, cheerfully to undertake the task. That public spirit and benevolence does exist in this town, in a high degree, very recent proof has been given. We call upon you, therefore, by the ties of interest, by the motives of humanity, and as you regard the pro-

moting of virtue and morality in the lower class of mankind, to second our proposals, and co-operate in our endeavours to obtain so desirable a reformation.

What probability of success our plan has, may be inferred from the following papers.

Extract of a Letter from Liverpool.

“ **T**HE management of the poor-
 “ house, in this town, deserves all
 “ the encomiums that can be paid; it
 “ has been a national subject, and en-
 “ quiries like yours are common from all
 “ parts. The merit is principally due
 “ to Mr. Brookes, a gentleman of large
 “ fortune, formerly in trade, who, for
 “ fifteen years past, has had the whole
 “ direction. I waited upon him with
 “ your

" your enquiries, and it is from him I
 " have got the information I shall pro-
 " ceed to communicate. The house,
 " which is built of brick, ornamented
 " with stone, is of this shape. 
 " The front, F, of four stories, is
 " all handsomely fashioned, and has
 " at top a cupola, with a clock: the
 " left hand front wing, g, is the gover-
 " nor's apartment; the right hand front
 " wing, c, the committee room. The
 " back wings are three stories high,
 " with galleries open to the area A,
 " and are the dwellings, each of which
 " consists of a house, into which you en-
 " ter from the gallery and two interior
 " chambers. Behind the left wing is
 " a range of offices, as brewhouse,
 " kitchens, washhouse, warehouse for
 " flour, peas, &c. curriers shop, joiners
 " shop, &c. The ground floor is the eating
 " room, over that the room for spinners
 " of

" of cotton with wheels, and over that,
 " being the attic story, are the orphans
 " lodgings, with their nurses. Over
 " the committee room are the spinners
 " of linen, over them spinners of wool,
 " two school rooms, &c. The situation
 " you know is on the top of an emi-
 " nence, which commands a view of the
 " town, harbour, river, and the sea: a
 " garden adjoins of about one statute
 " acre. The buildings cost about ten
 " thousand pounds, and were built by
 " savings from the usual former taxes*,
 " and a loan of four thousand pounds.
 " Mr. Brookes buys every thing with
 " ready money, which, advantage, with
 " the profits from the labour of the poor
 " in the house, amounts to about one

* By a subsequent letter from the writer of this, we are
 informed, that since the building of their new poor-house
 the levies are reduced one half, viz. from 2s. 6d. in the
 pound rent, to 1s. 3d.

" thousand

" thousand pounds per year. The spin-
 " ners are paid a certain rate for their
 " spinning, proportioned to quality and
 " quantity, and gratuities are given to
 " the young for encouragement to in-
 " dustry. The spun cotton is sold. The
 " wool and flax are got wove for the
 " use of the house; of wool, enough is
 " spun to make woollen cloths for all
 " this vast family. Leather for shoes
 " is bought from the tanner, and curried
 " in the house; wood for coffins, for
 " the parish, is bought in barks, got
 " sawed, but all made up in the house;
 " in short, there is an attention through
 " every department, to do every thing
 " with the greatest œconomy. It is
 " very clear, that a family who all em-
 " ploy their time for its use, who use
 " nothing but necessaries, and who buy
 " them with ready money, must live at
 " the least possible expence.

" The

"The physicians, who *give* their at-
 "tendance at the hospital, alternately
 "visit the poor-house, and other cha-
 "rities. It appears to me well worth
 "the while for three, or half a dozen
 "gentlemen, to come over, if you mean
 "to push a thorough reform. I can
 "conceive of a poor-house being so
 "constructed, with different areas, by
 "which to separate the orderly from
 "the uncivilized, that it should be a
 "comfortable retreat to the unfortu-
 "nate, as well as a necessary support
 "to the wretched. To the former every
 "attention should be paid to soften the
 "sufferings of dependence, of old age,
 "and the loss of liberty. By Mr.
 "Brookes's management, a neighbour-
 "ing parish for three years last past,
 "have reduced their poor's expence from
 "500l. to 220l. annually. This is an
 "example to the point."

The

The following is an extract of a letter from a gentleman who has the management of the poor-house of St. Paul, Covent-Garden, in answer to one sent by desire of the overseers.

“ I Should have attended to your letter to me of the 9th ult. on the subject of our work-house, but believe me I have been so much engaged in my office, in framing and carrying into execution an entire new regulation of the watch for this parish, that I have been prevented from doing you that trifling favour. However, Sir, I hope my delay in that particular will not prevent the gentlemen of your town from establishing a plan for the government of your work-house equally salutary to them, as that of St. Paul, Covent-Garden, has been to the parishioners thereof.

D

“ In

" In the year 1776 we obtained an
 " act of parliament to build a work-
 " house, in the parish of St. Pancras,
 " not having a convenient spot for that
 " purpose nearer, by which we had a
 " power of making a four penny rate to
 " pay off the principal and interest of
 " £. 5300, borrowed to build the same.
 " Our poor rate at that time was 17d.
 " which produced upon the rack rents
 " about £. 2200. After the first year
 " we reduced our poor's rate to 12d.
 " Our first step was to reduce our
 " number of poor, particularly out-
 " pensioners, by obliging all our poor
 " to go into the house, and to allow
 " no out-pensioners. By such steps,
 " and by making them work at diffe-
 " rent employments provided for them,
 " we reduced your expences the first
 " year near £. 600; and have, by good
 " oeconomy, with the said four penny rate,
 " and

" and by the surplus of the poor's rate,
 " reduced our original debt to £ 700.
 " Our house is large and every way
 " convenient, and the plan and go-
 " vernment thereof admirable to all
 " who have seen it. I could better
 " explain some things concerning this
 " undertaking of ours, if you was with
 " me on the premises, than I can by
 " letter; however, if after this repre-
 " sentation, there is any thing else you
 " would wish to be informed of in that
 " particular, you may freely commu-
 " nicate the same."

Extract of a letter from Nantwich.

" **T**HE heavy and numerous levies
 " which the township of Nantwich
 " laboured under in the maintenance and
 " support of its poor, who were in the
 " year 1779, and constantly had been,
 " for the greatest part, out-pensioners,

" urged the freeholders of that place
 " to exert their endeavours to bring
 " about the execution of a plan which
 " had been meditated, and strangely ne-
 " glected, for upwards of 20 years; and
 " having called a vestry meeting, and
 " adjourned themselves according to
 " the regular mode of law, they peti-
 " tioned and procured from the Earl of
 " Cholmondely, a conveyance of about
 " 11 acres of ground of an adjacent
 " common, called Beam-Heath, for the
 " purpose of erecting a new work-house,
 " and inclosing and improving the
 " same. Having done this, and got
 " likewise the consent, in writing, of
 " all the freeholders, a meeting was im-
 " mediately called, for raising a fund
 " for the uses above-mentioned, when
 " it was agreed to receive subscriptions
 " at £.30 each, to be paid in rateably,
 " when wanted, and to bear legal in-
 " terest

"terest from the date of the last receipt,
 "to be paid out of the poor's levies,
 "and that one subscription, or princi-
 "pal sum of £. 30, should be discharged
 "from the said rates every year, the
 "person so to be paid to be deter-
 "mined by ballot. A committee was
 "next appointed, together with a trea-
 "surer and clerk, to assist the com-
 "mittee. The clerk had a salary,
 "but the other were voluntary ser-
 "vices. The committee had full and
 "unlimited power of receiving plans
 "and estimates, agreeing and contract-
 "ing thereon, inclosing and improving
 "land, furnishing the house; and in
 "short, of doing and performing every
 "other act whatsoever, which might
 "appear necessary to expedite the un-
 "dertaking.

"The

1915 The buildings being at length com-
 15 pleted, it was thought prudent to
 16 new clothe all and every the poor,
 17 who came out of the old work-house,
 18 from head to foot, the old furniture
 19 not being suffered to come into the
 20 new house, for fear of bugs, &c. No-
 21 tice was given to all out-pensioners
 22 to attend the committee, to be exa-
 23 mined as to the state of their circum-
 24 stances, age, trade, and number of
 25 children; who acted as appeared to
 26 them best, either by taking them into
 27 the house, or by allowing a small
 28 pension out. With regard to the latter,
 29 always making it an invariable rule,
 30 *the relief should be only temporary, and as*
 31 *small as possible;* for the paupers will
 32 all aim to attain it from their detesta-
 33 tion of employment, rule, and order.

“ Those

" Those in the house are employed in
 " all kinds of work for their own
 " clothing, provision, and necessaries;
 " presuming, that if they are kept to the
 " manufactories for their own consump-
 " tion, cleaning the house, and mend-
 " ing their apparel, there will be the
 " least risque of imposition. They go
 " weekly to church, and are permitted
 " to go and see their relations, as the
 " visitor pleases. Offenders are whip-
 " ped, or kept on bread and water in
 " a dungeon, according to their of-
 " fences."

The letter concludes with informing
 us, that notwithstanding the large sums
 expended in new clothing all the poor
 who came out of the old to go into the
 new work-house, with a number of other
 extra disbursements, and the institution
 being

being yet in its very infancy, the salutary
 effects of it begin already to operate, by
 the levies decreasing, and that there is
 no doubt but it will fully and effectu-
 ally answer the ends intended. *man-
 tion, cleaning the house, and mend-
 ing their apparel, there will be the
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 ped, or kept on bread and water in
 a dungeon, according to their of-
 fences.* *S. I. N. I. S.*

The latter court with informing
 us, that notwithstanding the large sums
 expended in new clothing, all the poor
 who came out of the old into the
 new work-houses, with a great deal of other
 extra disbursements, and the institution
 being